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# Nicaraguan Rebels Make Do, Await Aid

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TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras—At a vast camp in the Honduran-Nicaraguan border hills, a new group of peasant youths had finished basic training and was ready to join fellow rebels fighting the Sandinista Army in Nicaragua.

Their commander, Enrique Bermudez of the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, addressed them in a ceremony during which the recruits filed by in review carrying a motley collection of old Mauser and Garand rifles without ammunition clips. Their sacrifice in leaving families and villages to risk guerrilla warfare filled him with pride, shouted Bermudez, a former colonel in the Nicaraguan National Guard. A trio sang the rebel anthem to hail the young men's entry into insurgent ranks.

A little later, however, a field officer who goes by the

nom de guerre of Commander Mike Lima acknowledged that the four-week training course in fact was a disguised delay, because the rebel organization was awaiting delivery of magazines and bullets for the AK47 assault rifles that will equip the peasant youths for battle in the Nicaraguan hills.

"We usually just train them in combat," he said, smiling and shifting the shiny prosthetic hooks that have replaced his right arm since it was blown off by a misfired mortar round.

This is a season of delay and making do for the four-year-old FDN guerrilla organization, the main force fighting to overthrow the Sandinista government in Managua. The U.S. Congress has held up funding for the guerrillas since May and, largely because of the hesitations in Washington, Honduran military officers have begun to question their country's role in the war.

U.S. money and Honduran support are vital. Although the rebels have kept their guerrilla war going eight months without official funding from the United States, Bermudez and his civilian colleagues have recognized that their own fund-raising efforts would be more difficult to sustain if Congress issued a definitive refusal to back their cause.

With this in mind, Bermudez and a high-ranking U.S. official have suggested that

the Reagan administration's final congressional resistance remains high, may be to prevent the issue from coming to a vote. So far, however, administration officials have sought to generate public and congressional support for renewal of funding through the Central Intelligence Agency.

"For me, covert or overt, as long as we keep getting the funds, I don't see any problem," Bermudez said to correspondents visiting his headquarters.

Responding to heavy urging from the administration, Congress last fall voted \$14 million more for Bermudez's forces but made disbursement of the funds contingent on a second vote this spring. Before halting the aid last year, the CIA had spent approximately \$80 million to organize and equip the guerrillas since 1981.

Honduran sources with access to the military command here said the congressional vote also will go a long way to determine the extent of Honduran welcome for the rebels. Middle-ranking Honduran officers with recently enhanced authority have questioned whether Honduras should continue harboring the rebels and offering them logistical support if the endorsement provided by U.S. funding is withdrawn by Congress, they explained.

A U.S. official closely involved in rebel operations since their inception said U.S. funding has been viewed by the Honduran military as a "shield" covering its own support of the guerrillas, deflecting Sandinista resentment and protecting against retaliation on Honduran soil.

However, with the congressional funds cut off and the prospect of a permanent repudiation of U.S. support, he added, Honduran officers have become worried about antagonizing their Nicaraguan neighbor on their own. On the other hand, U.S. and Honduran sources pointed out, a collapse of the guerrilla organization would present Hondurans with the danger of a 14,000-man armed force left with no resources and only Honduras as a refuge.

Because of these fears, the armed forces commander, Gen. Walter Lopez, has been particularly insistent in demands that the United States make written commitments about handling rebel forces if a continued fund cutoff leads to their disintegration.

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This has been a major factor in renegotiation of U.S.-Honduran military assistance accords under way for the last two months, U.S. and Honduran sources reported.

Without Honduran support, the rebel war would become dramatically more difficult, perhaps impossible, to carry on at its present level, even if more private or non-U.S. funds were found. Resupply flights to guerrilla squads in Nicaragua have been leaving for more than a year from a U.S.-improved air base at Aguacate in central Honduras, for example, although the funding interruption has grounded two rebel cargo planes in recent weeks, according to a high rebel official.

In addition, the main rebel camps lie in Honduras, including a headquarters at Las Vegas near the border, logistics camps at

other sites well inside the country and an administrative and communications facility on the outskirts of Tegucigalpa. Honduran Army tolerance for these installations and for movement of men and equipment among them has been key to the guerrilla war from the beginning.

In a demonstration that at least some Honduran officers have become nervous about the arrangement, the military recently tightened controls over rebel movements. Two U.S. State Department contract employees seeking to visit a rebel camp this month, for instance, were turned back by Honduran soldiers because they lacked a newly necessary written permit, U.S. and rebel officials said.

The Honduran military also has ordered guerrilla leaders to close a hospital on the

outskirts of Tegucigalpa and a large office where rebels used to receive visitors and reporters a short distance from the Honduran Foreign Ministry and the U.S. Embassy. Rebel officials, responding to the new atmosphere, have become distinctly more discreet in Tegucigalpa, sticking as much as possible to a hacienda called La Quinta on the edge of town.

Perhaps more telling, the Honduran newspaper El Tiempo, in what Honduran sources said was a leak planted by officers, reported recently that the government has given the rebels a deadline for leaving the country. The government responded with a sidestepping communique saying that Nicaraguan "refugees" are welcome here as long as they obey the law, leaving the issue unresolved.